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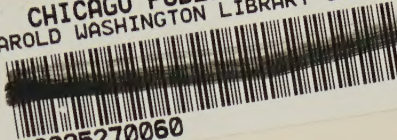
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FROM "SUNNY PASTURES"

BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

Lady Unafraid

From
"Sunny Pastures"

By
J. RALEIGH NELSON



THE CAXTON PRINTERS, LTD.
CALDWELL, IDAHO
1952

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DEDICATION

To Emma

Last night I awoke from my dreams, lonely,
Confused, lost in the void of the darkness.
I reached out my hand, groping for something I knew.
As I touched you, asleep there beside me,
The world took form like magic—
The little white house in its setting of elms, its gardens,
Its orchard and fields, and the brook with its willows.
As I passed in fancy from room after room
Of the rambling old house, I suddenly knew
That, out of the chaos of life, the touch of your hand
Had created the peace and beauty of home.

To You,

I dedicate these songs of my heart.

CONTENTS

I

AT "SUNNY PASTURES"

	<i>Page</i>
IN RETIREMENT	13
NEW WORLD	14
"ONE THING HAVE I DESIRED"	15
AT "SUNNY PASTURES"	16
WINDOWPANES	17
"A CROWN OF LIFE"	18
"GREEN PASTURES," "STILL WATERS"	19
HILLS	20
TIRED OLD FEET	21
NEW-PLOUGHED GROUND	22
NIGHT IN THE COUNTRY	23
MIDNIGHT WINTER WINDS	24
SLEEP	25
ECHOES	26
MORNING ECSTASY	27
MY TOWERS	28
MEMORIES	29
TO CHIN-CHIN	30
TO MY GIANT ELM	31
GUARDIAN TREES	32
MY MOSUL MAT	33
MY HEARTH RUG	34
SURVIVAL	35

II

IN MY GARDENS

	<i>Page</i>
MY ALTAR	39
ANTAEUS	41
WINTER SLEEP	42
FAITH	43
IRIS AT DAWN	44
IRIS	45
REMEMBRANCE	46
BY THE ORCHARD WALL	47
ROSE JAR	48
TO A GOLDFINCH	49
MY GARDENS	50

III

TIMES AND SEASONS

YOUTH AND AGE	53
"DAYLIGHT-SAVING TIME"	54
THE WEATHER PROPHET	55
THE OPTIMIST	56
LIGHT	57
SHADOWS	58
TWILIGHT	59
SEPTEMBER	60
SEPTEMBER SILENCE	61
OCTOBER NIGHT	62
OCTOBER DAWN	63
SUMAC	64
NOVEMBER ETCHINGS	65
DECEMBER MOON	66
AN ICY MORNING	67
THE LONE LIGHT	68
WINTER WHEAT	69
RED BARNS	70

	<i>Page</i>
ESCAPE	71
LISTENING	72
THE POND	73
RECURRENT SPRING	74
SPRING NIGHT	75
BEEES AND CORALS	76
MATINS	77
APRIL MORNING	78
APRIL SNOWS	79
AN APRIL DAY	80
SPRING SONG	81
MY FIRST ROBIN	82
MEADOW LARKS, MOURNING DOVES, AND YELLOWHAMMERS	83
PARTING IN MAY	84
RETURN	85
SUMMER RAIN	86
SUMMER STORM	87
SUMMER DAY	88
GOD'S SHINING	89

IV

AN EASTER CYCLE

ASH WEDNESDAY	93
ALTAR FLOWERS	94
LENTEN NIGHTS	95
A LENTEN LEGEND	96
TWO CROSSES	98
PATIENT LOVE	99
EASTER MORNING	100
HIS CHOSEN MESSENGER	101
AN EASTER THOUGHT	102
THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW	103
RESURRECTION	104
ETERNITY	105

V
AN OLD MAN'S MUSINGS

	<i>Page</i>
A PRAYER FOR AGING YEARS	109
AGING	110
TRANSFIGURATION	111
REMEMBERING	112
FORGETTING	113
HEART'S DESIRE	114
A QUEST	115
WINGS	116
THE PURE IN HEART	118
LIFE CYCLE	119
DAMON TO PYTHIAS	120
THE ANGELUS	121
THE RAINBOW	122
THE MEEK	123
PRAYER	124
REVELATION	125
HIS PEACE	127
MIRACLE	128
THE INNER LIGHT	129
HILLS AND STARS	130
SOMBER AUTUMNAL BEAUTY	131
TREASURE IN HEAVEN	132
TO A FRIEND IN SORROW	133
AS SEEING THE INVISIBLE	134
STARS AND TEARS	135
SHOES OF IRON AND BRASS	136
STORM CLOUDS	137
OUR WORLD	138
GOLDEN WEDDING DAY	139

I

AT "SUNNY PASTURES"



Pen-and-ink drawings by Wilfred B. Shaw

IN RETIREMENT ³

I have pressed feverishly so long toward distant goals
My eyes intent on visions of my soul,
That I have missed the things that lay at hand—
The snowflakes on the pane, the grain of sand,
The sundew with its rays of treacherous sweet;
The intricate design of things I meet—
The gauzy wings of katydid and dragonfly,
The flight of starlings 'gainst the autumn sky,
The unerring flight of homing bees,
The lacy pattern of the winter trees.
Oh, world of endless mysteries, so varied and so vast!
I greet thee, now that I am free at last,
Free from the need to reach a farther goal,
Free to feast on what most satisfies my soul.

NEW WORLD

The world I knew has faded to a dream,
The world I served so long, so joyously.
Strange, that as I face the West at last,
I harbor no regrets. This new, bright world
In which I live is all I hoped for,
All that I could wish. I sit alone
This long, slow afternoon in summer shade,
Not lonely, for the things I love,
The things I prize, are all about me—
The orchard with its gnarled old trees;
The sunny pastures sloping to the willow brook;
The wall of woods, and, just across the lawn,
Beneath its giant elms, the old white farmhouse,
Its friendly dormers looking to the East;
My book, my pad and pencil, and my dog;
And there upon the terrace, best beloved of all,
The incarnate spirit of this tranquil afternoon,
Whose eager soul that is not aging with the years,
Has made my winter, in this bright new world,
Perpetual spring.

"ONE THING HAVE I DESIRED"

One thing I ask, that, while I live, I still
May look upon the world as God's own house
Where I may dwell, as I have always dwelt,
Aware of all the beauty and wonder of His ways—
The heavens at dawn, at sunset, and, in June,
The clear, blue, cloudless noons;
Gray clouds, like chariots of God,
Charging across the stormy August sky;
The velvet darkness of a night with stars;
The full moon of a winter's night;
And sweet, soft April rains.
These things must never seem so commonplace
That, in them, I shall cease to see the "beauty of the
Lord."

And may I never weary of my quest
For new, amazing wonders in God's house,
My senses jaded or my eager zest grown old—
The autumn flight of geese; the flight of swans in spring;
The nesting of the ovenbird, the swallow, or the oriole;
The spider's weaving of his geometric web;
The unfolding of the lilac buds in May.
If, to the end, I do not miss the beauty of God's world,
Or lose my sense of wonder at His ways,
I shall have had my one great wish fulfilled.

AT "SUNNY PASTURES"

These are the things that I love best—
Day's dawning, the afterglow in the West,
The full moon riding high
In the infinite spaces of a midnight sky,
The summer sun across my wheat,
Turning it gold in the midday heat.
I love the long, sweet dawns of June,
And the autumn haze of an autumn noon,
And winter mornings, when a huge red sun
Rises over the woodlot down by the run,
And pendant crystals on orchard trees,
And grassblades, stirred by the morning breeze,
Shine ruby, shine emerald and diamond and rose.
But the little white farmhouse on its own little hill,
In my thought and affection, holds first place still,
And those who are in it, safe and warm
From rain and wind and winter storm.
These are the things that I hold most dear,
Winter and summer, throughout the year.

WINDOWPANES

The ancient, handmade windowpanes
Through which I view my world
Soften the rigid lines of all I see—
The angular, rhythmic lines of fences,
The stark, geometric shapes of barn and shed,
The tree boughs, bare against the late November sky.
All these, seen through the wavy glass, are things of
 beauty,
As if an artist, with a magic hand,
Had sketched these intricate designs.
I look out on my world as if I saw it
Through sheets of running water, blurred,
Etherealized, unreal—a dream of light and color.
So, seen through little ancient windowpanes,
It seems to me.

"A CROWN OF LIFE"

"A crown of life" laid up for me—
These tranquil years, my woods, my fields,
My friends, renewed acquaintance with old books
Long loved, but long forgot,
(The crowded years took far too heavy toll)
And, at the end, the peace that comes
When life's full obligations are all paid
And one can dream his dreams in peace.

"GREEN PASTURES," "STILL WATERS"

"Green pastures," "Still waters."

Magic words to set one's fancy dreaming—

Mirage across the wastes of desert days.

So have they often seemed to me.

When I have heard those magic words,

Lo, on the dim horizon, visions of oases shone

With promise of relief and rest.

"Green pastures." Little did I hope

That I should be so gently shepherded

From weary stretches of the desert road

To these green fields, these blooming orchards,

And my woodland brook;

That here, in lengthening shadows of the afternoon,

The peace that comes when night descends

Should come to me.

HILLS

I only need to lift my eyes
From book or script, from saw or plane,
To see, beyond the blue of lake,
My hills, from which through all the years
Have come to me, in times of need,
Relief from fear, access of strength,
Uplift of spirit, thrill of soul,
And courage for the days before.

TIRED OLD FEET

These tired old feet stretched out before me here,
Resting on the orchard sod,
Have gone a thousand, thousand miles
Since that dim, distant day
When they essayed their first adventurous steps alone,
While all the family held their breath and cheered.
Ah, little did those baby feet foresee
The long and tortuous path that they must take
To bring me here, at last, to rest
Beneath my flowering orchard trees!

NEW-PLOUGHED GROUND

Gray when the sky is dull and gray;
Faint rose in the rose of dawn;
Lavender, mauve, and purple and gold
In the twilight and the afterglow;
Pleated and lined where the drill has gone
In patterns of perfect mold;
Straight and level in low marsh ground,
Straight from East to West;
And in graceful curves of the contour lines
On the sloping sides of the hills.
Set in the green of the meadow land
And the green of the winter wheat,
There is nothing to me in the wide world round
More lovely than acres of new-ploughed ground.

NIGHT IN THE COUNTRY³

In our old farmhouse on its hill,
Where human life, for good or ill,
Has come and gone for years on end,
The Peace of God seems to descend
When twilight deepens and the stars appear.
The only sounds that strike the ear—
The frogs in chorus, and the whip-poor-will
Flailing the silence with his shrill,
Wild call. In town the stars seem far away,
As dim and distant as in blaze of day.
The neon lights, like flares of doom
Exaggerate the overhanging gloom,
And blind the surging crowds at night
To all the distant starry light.
The roar of traffic and the juke-box swing
Dull ear and sense to everything.
The peace and quiet of a country night
To me is pure and sure delight.

MIDNIGHT WINTER WINDS

I hate a midnight winter wind.
It roars across the empty winter fields,
Scattering the soft white coverlets of snow,
To leave the fallow land all bare and brown,
And tender winter wheat to shiver in the cold.
I hate the groan of tortured trees about the house,
The frightened chatter of the shutters,
The snarl of sleet against the pane.
But as I pull the covers up about my ears,
I sometimes wonder if, perhaps,
I would not feel the warmth and comfort of my bed
Quite so deliciously, if it were not
For those same midnight winter winds.

SLEEP

Oh, blessed sleep, that respite yields!
Tired eyes to close, tired feet to rest,
Tired hands to fold across my breast.
A brush of snow against the frosted pane
And then the silence of the night again.

ECHOES

Mornings, when it still is dark,
Sometimes I hear old Rover bark,
Far, far away beyond the hill,
Driving the cows for Uncle Will.
I rouse, to know it can't be so,
For Rover died long years ago,
And Uncle Will lies where he's lain,
In winter snows and summer rain,
Since I was just a growing boy,
'Trailing the cows my morning joy,
Down the lane, just he and I
And Rover, under the brightening sky.

.

Mornings, when it still is dark,
Sometimes I still hear Rover bark.

MORNING ECSTASY

The morning stars sang "Gloria! Gloria!"
And, in the fragrant dark before the dawn,
I joined them, singing "Gloria! Gloria!"
It was the prelude to a golden day
That soon would break in splendor
From beyond the hills.
"Oh, gloria, gloria!" Seemed my heart would burst!
No other words could voice the ecstasy
That filled my soul; only that high, exultant strain,
Only the morning stars and I, together,
Singing, "Gloria, gloria!"
"Gloria in Excelsis Deo!"

MY TOWERS

Across the fields, at dawn,
Roy Perkins' silos shine
Like gleaming towers of Carcassonne.
A ray of morning sun
Strikes up across the new-ploughed ground
And turns my towers to gold.
Oh, shining towers of Carcassonne!

MEMORIES

My Uncle Will's old house,
Where he and my Aunt Mary lived,
Where he was born and where he brought her
When he wedded her, still stands
Beside a wooded road I love—
Still mistress of the farm his father cleared
When all these tidy fields were wilderness.
'Tis fifty years, or more, since last
I entered through that open door,
For strangers whom I never knew
Have long since claimed it as their own.
The two I loved have lain upon the hill,
Resting tired hands and tired hearts,
Through all the peaceful years since then,
Since, as a little boy, I trailed them—
Patient at all their endless tasks—
From barn to bin, from well to sink,
From woodlot to the pasture gate,
Learning the things that still seem beautiful to me.
Sometimes I think I'll knock
And ask admittance at that door,
But when I think how strange and empty
Those familiar rooms would seem,
How I would miss those two beloved ones,
I pass on by, along the wooded road,
Content with my long memories.

TO CHIN-CHIN

I always knew, my little pet,
In Persia, India, or Thibet,
In some forgotten incarnation,
You were a lady of high station,
A princess, marquise, or a queen,
Ruling with dignity your wide demesne.
Your golden Oriental eyes,
So slumbrous, passionless, and wise,
Your coat of softest silver gray,
Your haughty, languorous, queenly ways,
Made evident to every one
That you were not of common run.
You may be short on deep emotion—
You are not strong on deep devotion—
But, with your haughty, lofty air
You decorate our choicest chair,
Except when you descend to eat
What I prepare of bread and meat.
I can't help feeling quite inferior
In the presence of one so consciously superior.

TO MY GIANT ELM

Oh, noble elm! How often has my soul
Been lifted from some dark and somber mood,
At twilight time, on those great arms of thine
That seemed to bear the very dome of night
On their dim finger tips!
And there I found the stars that I had lost—
Shining, undimmed by all the earthly woe
That weighed so heavily upon my troubled soul.



GUARDIAN TREES

I heard them whispering among themselves at midnight
And knew the wind was rising—my giant elms,
Twelve stalwart guardians of my little house.
Their arms tossed grim defiance to the threatening storm.
I heard the sullen muttering of thunder in the west,
And then the storm came roaring in
Across my neighbor's treeless fields.
The farmhouse on its little hill—
A century old, its timbers pegged and mortised
As sturdily as timbers of a clipper ship—
Quivered and shook before the fury of the blast.
But I was well assured, for well I knew
My guardian trees would take the impact of the storm.
I heard them roar and groan in struggle with the wind,
And when the morning came, the lawn was strewn
With broken limbs and torn and tattered leaves.
My trees, as always through the years,
Had guarded well the house and those within,
Their sheltering arms entwined, outspread above its roof.

MY MOSUL MAT

This is my fish pool, cool and dim,
With tangled roses round its rim,
And, floating on its surface blue,
A water-lily pad or two;
And, golden fishes, in and out
Its shadowy depths, make merry rout.
This little square from Orient loom
Transforms my simple living room.
I muse upon its gay design
And thank the Lord that it is mine.

MY HEARTH RUG

My Saraband, the best beloved of all my rugs,
Lies in a favored place before my hearth.
When winter nights have shut me in,
And snow has blocked the rutted roads to town,
I sit before my fire and muse
On all the wear my rug has known.
Its warp and woof have borne the sands of all the world.

* * *

I never saw the Peiping palaces, the Taj Mahal,
The Parthenon, the Mayan ruins, nor the Inca gold.
But all the lands beneath the skies
Have sent their sons to me,
 The flower of all their youth;
 Iraq, Iran, and Lebanon,
 India, Egypt, and Cathay,
 Brazil, Peru, the Argentine.
Of every race and creed;
 Brahmin, Parsee, Moslem, Jew,
 Turk, African, and Japanese,
 Icelander, Finn, and Siamese—
All, in their time, have trod this ancient rug,
And now, years after, still they have returned,
Men burdened with affairs of state,
And sons of sons whom I have known,
To sit a while with me before my fires
Their feet upon the rug that knew their sires.

NOTE: This rug lay in my office at the International Center all the years when I served as the Director of the Center and the Counselor to Foreign Students.

SURVIVAL

Life cannot be so doomed, so utterly amiss
As it would seem when floods of human woe
Come pouring in upon me from my radio;
Nor man, as man, be doomed to the abyss
Or vanish like a puff of mist in space,
The last survivor of a degenerate race.
For moon and stars and all the heavenly spheres
Maintain quite undisturbed the cycle of the years.
The moon that last night on my acres shone
Rose over Hammurabi's Babylon;
And here in Pittsfield seasons come and go,
The fields in spring to plough, the seed to sow.
The harvests ripen and are garnered in,
Stored for winter use in barn and bin.
The munching cows, in their slow, solemn way,
File up the shadowy lane at close of day,
As they have ever done since Homer's time,
Or Gray made them immortal in his rhyme.
Empires crumble, kingdoms rise and fall,
The Jeremiahs leave no hope at all.
But, while in peaceful countrysides like this
The round of homely duties do not go amiss,
Life will survive.

II

IN MY GARDENS

MY ALTAR

Abraham, in his long quest,
Where'er he halted, built altars to his God.
I, too, have built an altar to my God.
It is my garden. In no other place
Has God seemed ever quite so near.

AUTUMN

I strew my poppy seed, broadcast,
Before the first light snow.
I know, that, with the April rain and April sun,
Each tiny seed will send a fragile thread of green
Groping upward through the soft spring air toward God.
When June shall come—so soon it comes—
Where once there was but bare, brown soil,
Behold—a sheet of brilliant bloom!

WINTER

I cannot sleep these moonlit winter nights.
The unearthly beauty of my garden 'neath the moon
Would haunt my dreams. So, often, I arise
To stand before my dormer, facing East,
And there below me, still and white,
My garden sleeps beneath the glistening drifts!
They are not dead—the flowers I love—
They only sleep; and, in the magic dark,
Each treasures its own vital spark against the day
When, from the budding orchard, or the greening lawn,
A robin or a bluebird calls
To bid them wake and bloom again.

SPRING

The sturdy little things have braved the storms of
March—
The snowdrops, scillas, crocuses, and hyacinths—
And now, in May, the tulips sweep the garden like a
flame;
And iris stand, like soldiers on parade,
In ranks a thousand strong along my paths.

SUMMER

The summer solstice brings me summer dawns,
And noonday splendor of gay peonies,
And larkspur, shoulder high, and columbines.
I walk among my lilies like one who walks
Before the shining candles of a shrine.
The wonder in my heart is like a prayer,
That from those rough and scaly bulbs
Should, now in June, stand tall, white lilies,
Like choirs of angels, in the summer noon.
.
In germinating seed, in budding plant,
In burgeoning beauty of the season's bloom,
I feel God's presence in my shrine.
I seem to hear, across the years, a strain of long familiar
music:
To me, in this sweet spot,
"The glory, the glory of the Lord has been revealed."

ANTAEUS

Antaeus, when he touched the earth,
Rose, strong to fight again,
For inner forces felt, but little understood,
Surged through his throbbing veins, his straining muscles,
And his panting heart.
Like him, I rise, refreshed, revitalized,
If, only for one hour, I kneel
Some bright spring day upon the quick'ning earth,
To plunge my aging fingers in the soil,
To rub it lovingly between my palms,
To sift it through my fingers, soft and fine,
To press it gently down about the rootlets
Of my tender seedling plants.

WINTER SLEEP

The last brave bloom is gone, her fragile form
Torn by the wind. The first November storm
Has laid its coverlet of snow on path and bed.
And yet I know my flowers are not dead.
Beneath the snow they only bide the day
When April will be here and April rain,
And they will wake and bloom again.

FAITH

Today I planted tulip bulbs.
It is an earnest of my faith.
The cold of windless winter nights
Will turn this mellow soil to stone;
The cycle of the year revolve
One half its course, till April come.
Immured by winter cold, I'll wait—
Cheered, confident, expectant, in my faith,
That, deathless through the cold and dark,
The spark of life within these bulbs
Will stir and push through stubborn clay
Up into the glory of some April day.

IRIS AT DAWN

If you would know how lovely iris are,
Get up some morning as the light of dawn
Pierces the misty dimness of the lawn.
And when the first long shaft of light
Strikes in through shadows of the lingering night,
Each new-blown flower will shine like some rare gem
Fit for an oriental monarch's diadem—
Amethyst and pearl, sapphire, aquamarine,
Topaz and ruby set in emerald green.
If you have never seen them in the light of dawn
Against the morning green of some sweet lawn,
You do not know how lovely iris are.

IRIS

Oh, that this day in June might last,
The day for which I waited half impatiently!
Through all the white monotony of winter snows,
The vicious winds of March, the April rains,
I dreamed of such a day in coming June,
And now that day has dawned.
Before the sun is up, I pass them in review—
My iris, all along the terraces,
The borders of the lawn, the winding drive.
I pluck the faded flowers of yesterday.
"How beautiful you were but hours ago!"
I say, "How briefly did you glow like gems
Shot through with early sun! How fleeting were your
 charms!
Each day I see you bloom and fade.
A week of gorgeous color and you'll all be gone—
A memory only of these days in June."

REMEMBRANCE

I like to think that when I'm gone
These little grape-like hyacinths,
That have adorned my garden path
For fifty years or more,
Will bloom each spring to end of time.
There may be no one then who will recall
My brief and inconspicuous years;
But while these nurslings of my garden beds
Still bloom, I shall not be forgot,
These sweet memorials of my garden years.

BY THE ORCHARD WALL³

There's a spot that I love in my garden, along by the
orchard wall,

White as snow in the springtime when the pear-tree petals
fall.

Over the ancient brickwork the roses bloom in the sun,
And through the rough, tangled grasses, the wild straw-
berry tendrils run.

There are six little white wooden markers in a pitiful
little row—

Billie and Hector and Gwynnie, Denny, Wendy, and
Beau.

As I pause to rest in my garden on the bench by the
orchard wall,

I look at the white wooden markers and wish there could
come to my call,

My six gay Cocker puppies, comrades of long ago—

Billie and Hector and Gwynnie, Denny, Wendy, and
Beau.

ROSE JAR

This rose jar holds the petals that I plucked
When I was but a boy—but seventeen—all sentiment
And dreamy eyed. I lift the lid
And suddenly the fragrance of a half-forgotten June
Floats out to me. Oh wondrous alchemy!
My mother's garden, my mother's roses,
And a summer moon flooding the garden beds
With silver, and a summer dew
Distilling the fragrance from the sleeping flowers.
Sweet memories! Sweet memories of a distant June!

TO A GOLDFINCH

Oh, vibrant, wingèd thing,
Mounting the invisible steeps of air—
Tireless, undaunted,
Showering your notes of ecstasy
Down the limitless declivities of space
In rising, falling rhythms of joy!
Oh, flash of golden wings against the blue!

MY GARDENS

Somewhere, in the limitless spaces of eternity,
The flowers that I have grown on earth,
In all the gardens of my life, will bloom again.
These fleeting, fragile things that I have loved,
Gone, faded almost in the hour,
Now, untouched by worm or blight,
Deathless, at last, will bloom again for me.

III

TIMES AND SEASONS

YOUTH AND AGE

How swiftly do the seasons pass when one is old!
Today is autumn; yesterday, it seems, came spring; came
summer;
And tomorrow winter comes.
When I was seventeen, each day was as a thousand years,
So full of new glad hours:
A day in spring, epochal, rich with vital forces
Surging up in tree and flower, and coursing in my veins
and nerves;
The long, slow days of summer heat,
Breathless along the corn rows where we toiled,
But ending in the lingering coolness of a summer dusk,
Sweet with the smell of swamp and woods
That brought refreshing to our bodies as we lay
On dew-wet grass beneath the dooryard trees;
The autumn days, when distant hills
And woods seemed floating in a pearly mist,
Fit days for youthful dreaming;
Crisp, icy days of winter,
A tonic to both body and to soul;
And winter evenings when the wood was piled on open
fires.
At seventeen, a day was as a thousand years.
But now, at seventy and more, so swiftly do the seasons
run,
A thousand years might seem, in retrospect, one single
day.

"DAYLIGHT-SAVING TIME"

Time was when we resented "Daylight-Saving 'Time."
To us who plough and sow and reap,
Who tend our cattle and our sheep,
"Sun Time"—"God's Time," as we were wont to say—
Was good enough to measure time of any day—
"God's Time," that followed rise and set of sun.
It summoned us from bed before the day had e'er begun,
And gave us respite from our days of toil
And grubbing endlessly in stubborn soil,
By blessed darkness folding us to rest
Soon as the light had faded from the west.
The times and seasons must be kept inviolate,
Ordained by laws we dared not deprecate,
Each hour of daylight, its own appointed task.
God made it so. What better could we ask?
We rose in darkness when, before the dawn,
The rooster's strident trumpet called across the lawn.
We knew our daily duties soon must be begun.
The cattle lowing at the pasture gate
Called us to milking when the day was done.
No need was there for man to legislate.
"Sun time"—to us "God's Time"—was "Daylight-Saving
Time."

THE WEATHER PROPHET

If the wind be east or the wind be west,
Or north or south as the Lord sees best,
I always cheerfully, gaily say,
"It's going to be a beautiful day!"

If it's raining in torrents at a quarter of seven,
I hopefully say, "It'll clear by eleven."
If the fields are parched for want of rain,
I chant the good word like an old refrain,
"The rain crow is croaking. Tomorrow, I know,
We'll begin six days of rain in a row."

If my farmer friends complain of the heat,
I assure them a cold spell—it may even be sleet,
Will soon be upon us, or possibly snow.
It snowed once in August, I'd like them to know.
The result of this idiot, unfailing good cheer?
Some neighbors pronounce me a little bit queer.
As a prognosticator, I'm in utter disgrace,
A weather prophet who has quite lost face.
But this I note with some satisfaction,
When friends of mine are in utter distraction,
(The weather is just what they wish it were not)
They're always glad to get what I've got.
If they ask, in despair, the question of whether
It'll rain or be clear, I chirrup, "Clearing weather."

THE OPTIMIST

I have a friend who used to say,
On some dark, snowy, late-winter day,
"I think we'll have an early spring,
For yesterday I saw the queerest thing—
A little gray bird that went upside down,
On the trunk of a tree, like a circus clown."
I loved my friend too much to say
That the little gray nuthatch, in his ironical way,
Spent most of his winter, upside down,
Deceiving the gullible people of town
Who don't know birds and their hardy ways—
Nuthatches, cardinals, sparrows, and jays,
And raising their hopes, in the winter cold,
That the crocuses soon would begin to unfold.
His face was so bright and so full of hope
That I smiled and said: "Well, no use to mope!
The winter is here, but spring's bound to come.
We can always keep hoping. No use to be glum!
The nuthatch's prophesy may come true;
We may have spring in a fortnight or two."

LIGHT

"Let there be light," God said; and there was light,
Dispelling the gloom of that eternal night.
Here in my orchard, where I 'wait the dawn,
No voice of thunder bids the dark be gone,
But silent magic stirs the sleeping birds.
"Light! Let there be light," they chant
From orchard, field, and misty lane.
A meadow lark above the grain,
A cardinal, an ovenbird, an oriole,
Pour out their ecstasy of soul.
The morning mists turn rose, turn gold.
The miracle of God, so new, so old!
Once more He clothes Himself in light.
The birds and I in praise unite.

SHADOWS

Morning shadows lie lightly on the meadow grass
Like half-remembered traces of some youthful dream.
The little hedgerow saplings at the pasture's edge
Throw long and slender shadows to the pasture gate.
Morning shadows shorten, lighten, fade,
Until they lie like pools of liquid jade
About each little bole. Morning shadows
Are but fleeting when the day is young.
But evening shadows, gold across the wheat,
Lengthen, deepen, darken, as the sun descends,
Blend with the gathering twilight of the coming night,
Like rich, but somber, memories, when the day is old.

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SEPTEMBER

I heard a robin singing beside his empty nest,
He sang faint snatches of the songs he sang in June,
Sang softly, as in autumn dusks,
Beside my open fires, I often hum old melodies
That take me back, in memory, to distant springs
And half-forgotten Junes.

SEPTEMBER SILENCE

No bird note greets September dawns.
Only a crow, at some far forest edge,
Proclaims his vigil's end, the day's beginning;
And, from the marsh, a little owl,
That loves the dark, sends out
His throbbing note of protest to the day.
The world awaits the sun, as worshipers await the host,
In bowed and reverent silence charged with prayer.
No more the exultant music of the dawns of spring,
The joyous madrigals of May, the rich full symphonies
 of June,
But silence charged with wonder and with awe.

OCTOBER NIGHT

Hoarfrost and moonlight, October moon above the elms;
My garden white and cold and silent—empty,
Where, only yesterday, it seems, the lilies bloomed,
And, all along the paths, alyssum, mignonette,
And lavender and phlox and heliotrope
Paid fragrant tribute to the sun.

OCTOBER DAWN

One solitary katydid
Persists; "She did! She did! She did!"
October cold has made him hoarse,
Yet, as the night of raucous song
Begins to brighten toward the dawn,
Alone—all other singers silenced long—
Alone, he maunders on.
Confused, and lacking opposition,
He drowsily proclaims, "She didn't!"
Then suddenly recalls, "She did! She did!"
At last, his rusty voice grown weary,
He finally admits, "She didn't."

SUMAC

The sumac at the forest's edge
That, summer long, has grown unnoticed and despised,
Touched by the magic of October frost,
This cold, still night,
Becomes the glory of the countryside.

NOVEMBER ETCHINGS

Now that the leaves are gone, the trees, quite unabashed,
Reveal their naked beauty to the sun;
Their shadows lie at noon upon the grass
In patterns of delight. At night, the stars
Are strung, like Christmas candles, on their boughs,
Which, only yesterday, flung autumn glory to the skies.
This sunset hour the arches of my wineglass elm
Are etched in lines of soaring grace against the West—
Lines, sharp and fine, incised in beaten gold.

DECEMBER MOON

Last night, before I went to bed,
I saw the full moon overhead.
It hung, a shining silver ball
Above the eastern forest wall.
This morning, in the pink of dawn,
Above "my towers of Carcassonne."*
It shines, a globe of radiant gold,
Across the fields so white and cold.
The sun to east, the moon to west,
Between them, gild each snowy crest.
One glorious moment, ere the "Queen of Night"
Blushes, pales, and fades from sight.

* See "My Towers," p. 28.

AN ICY MORNING

The rain that beat all night against my panes,
Has turned the branches of my elms to skeins
Of woven silver, which they wear like diadems.
Their crystal pendants flash like precious gems.
The dazzling pattern of their intricate design
Is etched in sharp detail, each graceful line
Like some fine etching done on opaque glass.

THE LONE NIGHT

Winter mornings in the dark,
Icy-cold and white and stark,
Across the fields one gleaming light
Relieves the darkness of the night.
Earl Perkins, in the low, warm shed,
Is milking ere the stars have fled.
The morning seems less bleak for me
Because in fancy I can see
The stanchions with their munching cows
And feel the warmth beneath those mows
Of fragrant hay.

WINTER WHEAT 3

If it were not for winter wheat,
Undaunted by the snow and sleet,
The winter scene were much too drear.
Its living green lends fleeting cheer
To leaden skies and whitened field,
Lined with the stubble of the summer's yield.
A promise of a far-off spring, it seems,
Like some bright lawn envisioned in our dreams.
When, later, winter's smothering snows,
That lie for months on stubble rows,
Shall melt at last on southern slopes,
The wheat will be the earnest of our hopes.
We'll know the winter is not done,
But turn our faces gladly to the sun.

RED BARNS

Sometimes, when winter snows have lain too long
Upon the rolling acres of my land,
My eyes, that love the brown of new-ploughed ground,
The green of summer fields, the blue of larkspur,
And the golden wheat, grow sated of a crystal world.
I long for color, like some disembodied soul—
Starved, dispossessed of all the passions of a normal life,
The warmth of body and the warmth of soul
Frozen for all eternity.
For brown of fertile soil, for green of growing corn
I long, and red of blazing poppies in the sun.
I search the cold, white landscape for relief
From all the dazzling splendor of the snow.
There, on the circle of my little world,
I see the silos, gleaming white, the straw stacks
Buried in the snow, the fence rows, drifted high.
Then—glad relief!—against the wintry sky,
I see the old red barns on "Allen's Place"
And there I rest my eyes, aweary of the snow.

ESCAPE

A late-March rain has turned the snowy drifts
To gray. From all along the flooded brook
A sullen fog rolls up across my fields
And blots from view the brown, dark wall
Of woods that marks the boundaries of my land.
The night descends upon my little house,
A crushing load of gloom. No gloom within!
Within, are warmth and cheer and comfort still.
A hundred years and more, the sturdy frame
Of this old house has stood the blasts of wind
And rain. Beneath its roof a score of men have lived
From birth to age, and rounded out their years.
And still the old house puts its shoulder to the storm.
How safe, how sheltered do we feel tonight
Beneath its ancient roof, within its walls!
I pull the shades and draw the curtains close,
And so shut out the darkness and the storm.
The lights are lighted, supper spread, fresh wood
Is piled on open fires. No radio tonight!
No news! Tonight, I could not bear the impact
Of its gloom. Here is a respite, here escape
From all the dark depression of the storm
And all the turbid misery of a world gone mad.

LISTENING

These mid-March mornings, I'm listening—
Listening for what I scarce know.
I place my ear to the silence
That has lain so long on the snow—
Listening for sounds of my neighbors
That tell that their day has begun—
Earl Perkins in the field with his tractor,
Ed Green in the swamp by the run
Calling the cows to the milking,
Walt Schneider calling hogs on the hill.
The long, long winter silence
Lies like a spell on us still.
Not even the call of a rooster,
When the darkness brightens toward dawn,
Nor the quavering song of a robin
In the elm at the edge of the lawn!
I'm listening, my ear to a silence
That throbs in the magical air.
I can hardly wait for the moment—
The suspense is almost painful to bear—
When faint, now far, now near,
I hear the call of a bluebird
And know that, at last, spring is here.

THE POND

The pond across the road in Perkins' field
Provides a mirror like a burnished shield.
It doubles quite the beauty of my day—
The blue of April and the soft white clouds of May.
At evening, when the summer day is done,
And all the sky is gilded by the setting sun,
The pond, set in the green of growing corn,
Glows golden yellow like a cairngorn.
In the lingering twilight of an August day,
The new moon shines, a silver sickle on a pewter tray.
As twilight deepens, and the fading light
Portends the darkness of the coming night
The evening star, great Venus, mirrored in the pond,
Beholds herself aglitter like a diamond.

RECURRENT SPRING

When I was young, I took my springtime in its course.
Since winter came, then spring must not be far behind.
Young blood found zest in stinging winter cold,
Delight in slides and frozen ponds,
In traps set craftily along the icy brooks,
And bobsled parties on the snowy roads
On moonlit nights. I saw the winters wane
With genuine regret. Spring brought its rush of work—
The rising in the dark of dawn to milk and feed the cows,
The long and weary twilight of a day that never seemed
to end,
Ploughing, planting, hoeing, weeding.
Yet spring stirred something magical in my young heart.
To lie in orchard grass at noon, face upward to the sky,
To dream and feel the vital forces of the earth
Go tingling, thrilling through my youthful nerves:
Yes, spring was time for love and new, mad life.

But now, when winter snows at last are gone
And all the world awakes, spring seems a sacrament.
"Another spring," I say in awe, "Again the tulips blazing
in the sun,
Again the fragrant wild crab blooming in the lane,
Again my birds back home from distant summer lands!
Oh, wonderful that I am here to greet them all again!"

SPRING NIGHT

A full moon in an iridescent mist
Above the budding branches of the wine-glass elm;
String symphony of frogs across the orchard
From the swamp by Wilsey's woods;
And high and faint, the honking of wild geese
Hurtling northward through the misty, moonlit night.

BEES AND CORALS

The March winds slow the swelling of the budding elms.
Too soon their golden tassels, delicate as air,
Will shimmer in the tender light of April dawns.
I would prolong the slow unfolding of the buds,
Prolong the joy of watching, day by day,
The stark and noble beauty of the leafless boughs
Soften, as buds appear, turn pink as corals
For a day and then as gold as flights of bees.
These precious days should last; they pass too soon!
It seems but yesterday I traced the sweeping lines
Of trunk and bough against the wintry sky,
The dazzling whiteness of the snowy fields,
Or saw their twigs, like silver filagree,
Against the roseate glory of a sunset West.
The miracle of life resurgent is all too soon accomplished
And summer foliage will pant again in summer heat.

MATINS

A mist like pale chiffon,
Shot through with rose and gold,
Floats out across the April fields.
The giant elm beside the old horse barn
Thrusts high its mighty arms
Above the undulating mist—
High into the clear blue of the morning sky.
Upon its topmost branch, a single robin
Sings his matins to the misty morn.

APRIL MORNING

Pinnacles and domes of Heaven
Floating in pearly mists
Above the Perkins' farm upon the hill!
Clouds piled on clouds in giant masses
Dwarfing the barns, the silos, and the checkered fields!
A vision and a dream!

APRIL SNOWS

Why should I dread the impending doom
That some predict? The scillas bloom
In sheltered corners of my garden wall;
And I can hear the bluebird call
Across the silence of an April snow.
I surely cannot fail to know
The sun and gentle April rain
Will melt the snow and bring again
The promise of a radiant May.
I still shall see a better day.
My troubled world will weather through
And see a happier century, too.

AN APRIL DAY

It would be irony, indeed,
If when I come to go
On some sweet day in spring like this,
I suddenly awoke, confused and lonely,
In some dim, vague, misty place,
Where I must grope for things familiar that I love.
There must be sky where I shall go,
Arched, tender blue, above the green and gold
Of meadows, with a cloud or two,
A fluff of white like angel wings.
There must be skies to speak God's glory
In the language that I know—
In sunrise, sunset, and the spangled night with stars.
There must be stars where I shall go,
Nor could I be content,
Unless somewhere I found my garden
Blooming in eternal spring,
A day like this in April that would never end.

SPRING SONG

A robin in the dark before the dawn
Pipes up the theme that starts the melodious round,
Which others follow. The theme, thus happily begun,
The catbird mimics with a sly intent.
The starling, burlesque king of song,
Makes coarse and vulgar uses of the theme.
A thrush, above such low and roguish tricks,
Elaborates the theme in rich detail,
And, high above the symphony of sound,
Trills obligato to their merry round.

MY FIRST ROBIN

If you had never heard a robin sing,
To you, these verses would not mean a thing;
But if, at sunset on some April day,
You lift your head to listen and to pray
In reverence, joy, and humble thanks to God,
Because, across the unawakened sod,
You think you hear the first faint robin's song
For which you've waited, waited now so long,
Then I'll not try to tell you what I feel.
It seems as if I almost ought to kneel
This evening when I hear my robin sing.
If you can even fancy such a thing,
You'll quite appreciate, as well as I,
That nothing—nothing, underneath the sky—
The first wee crocus, scilla, violet, or anything—
Can thrill me with such hope for spring
As when I hear my first brave robin sing.

MEADOW LARKS, MOURNING DOVES, AND YELLOWHAMMERS

The April pastures on this April morning
Are white as winter with a thick hoarfrost.
The meadow larks pipe happily—brave optimists.
Their notes are vibrant with the purest joy.
But in shadowy spruces by the well,
The mourning doves sulk gloomily and moan.
They do not love this half-reluctant spring.
The yellowhammers on the farmhouse roof
In gay bravado, with boisterous taunt and jeer,
Drum out their rough defiance to the frosty morn.

PARTING IN MAY

When I shall come to go, let it be May.
Oh, not the gloom of somber, dull November,
Nor yet the harsh and cruel winds of March,
But May—all sunshine, flowers, and song—
The perfume of the lilacs on the wind,
And applebloom and violets.
Then shall I go with sweet remembrance
Of things I loved. But most,
I beg you, Dearest, let me see
Your face, not bitter nor in tears,
But smiling as you ever smiled
Your brave, brave smile.

RETURN

I wonder if some dawn in May,
When I, at last, have slipped away,
I shall return to wander here
Along these garden paths so dear.
No other place can be so fair
That I would stay forever there.
Or bring me such eternal bliss
That I would cease to long for this—
The lilacs and the apple trees,
The pears, the plums, the hum of bees.
No one will see me or suspect me there.
I shall be unsubstantial as the air.
But all the flowers will stir and nod
And lift their heads in thanks to God.
And every fragrant blooming tree
Send showers of petals down to me,
Some lovely dawning day in May.

SUMMER RAIN

"Tommy Tree Toad" chortles and chuckles
At the smell of rain in the air.
"Bob White," from the orchard fence,
Calls to his mate on her nest in the grass,
"More wet; more wet; more wet!"
Robins chant from the apple tree
By the farm-house door, "At last; at last!"
And the cows, at the pasture gate,
Stand sniffing the promise of rain,
Heads up, eyes fixed on the clouds—
Great thunderheads blooming out of the West,
Above the barns on the old Mills' Place.
Not a leaf on the pendant branches,
Not a flower petal quivers or stirs, waiting breathless
For the sweet first drops of the freshening rain.

SUMMER STORM

I saw the chariot of God
Charge out across a darkening summer sky
I saw the sparks of summer lightning
Flash from its thundering wheels.
"It looks like rain," a country neighbor,
Driving by, called out to me.
"It looks like rain, at last."

* * *

The clouds to him were only signs of rain.
I, too, was glad for rain.
My corn, beyond the garden fence,
Was parched and gray with dust.
But in my heart I was more deeply moved
Because, to me, the clouds were chariots of God,
And, in the pageant of the summer storm,
I saw God, clothed in majesty, sweep by
On wings of summer wind.

SUMMER DAY

This day is lovelier than all the yesterdays,
And no tomorrow surely could be half so fair.
No shadowed thought from out the past,
No lurking dread of things to come,
Must claim one precious moment of this day,
Nor vain regret nor somber brooding
Disturb the placid surface of its peace,
Its sunshine, bracing air, its pools of noonday shade,
Its lingering shadows of an afternoon,
And sunset glory at the end.

GOD'S SHINING

Out of the beauty of summer skies—
The silence of skies of midnight stars;
The terrible beauty of storm-tortured skies,
Black and boiling with wind and rain,
Split by terrible bolts of flame;
Sunsets in winter across the snow,
The flaming glory of Northern Lights—
Out of all skies, through a life's contemplation,
Out of these shrines of my soul, "hath God shined."

IV

AN EASTER CYCLE

ASH WEDNESDAY

The candles flamed before the altar cross,
Flickered and flared, as if the breath of God
Were breathing through the shrine.
Seen through my tears from where I knelt
Upon the pavement of the empty nave,
Those points of lambent flame
Burst into galaxies of radiant gold.
And every candle bore upon its head
A shimmering halo like an angel's crown.
The quivering rays of living light
Pierced through the shadows of the pillared nave
To where I knelt in penitence.
And lo! the Light of God dispelled my gloom.

ALTAR FLOWERS

I place my tulips reverently before the golden cross.
They glow like gems before the panels of the reredos.
My prayers of praise have never been more surely sped
Than by these nurslings from my garden bed.
No need for priest or acolyte, for ritual or song,
No cloud of incense drifting above the kneeling throng.
Each jeweled, chaliced cup bears up my thanks to God
For all these miracles of beauty wrought from the sullen
clod.

These flowers, dear God, a votive offering, I bring.
The long, dull winter, and the slow, reluctant spring,
I prayed that I might hope to see again
These tulips blooming in the sweet spring rain.

LENTEN NIGHTS

The forty days were days of bodily distress,
The desert wind and dust, the desert sun—
By noon, the sky a dome of brass above His head;
The empty spaces of the wilderness and He alone.
The days were torture to His body, but with night,
His soul found respite and relief—
The drenching dews of twilight; the evening coolness
Breathing upward from the dimming plain;
The darkness blotting out the brooding world;
And then—the stars, the sense of space, infinity,
And God, His glory spelled across the sky
In shining constellations. . . .
Then, at last came sleep, came dreams,
Those strange, alluring dreams of power,
Of conquest of the world, of nature, and Himself,
His own soul still an unsolved mystery.

A LENTEN LEGEND

Spring came at last to the brown Judean hills.
Across the desert wastes, upon the wind,
He heard the first faint twittering of birds,
And raised His tired, gaunt face to listen.
A sudden dash of rain swept up the slope.
He rose to meet its freshening coolness,
Grateful to His eyes, inflamed by desert dust,
His lips so parched by desert sun.

* * *

The forty days were past. His vision of His life
Had cleared. Forsaking all, He would go forth
To serve, in humble ways, the needs of men,
To make appeal for kindness and good will,
That in the world there might be peace.
Still, on the far horizon of His life,
There loomed one cloud of doubt—
The little shop at Nazareth. Should it be closed?
Should these strong hands forget their skill—
These youthful hands that loved the fragrant wood?
Should he, so young, become a wandering mendicant?
Food? Raiment? Shelter? Whence would come these
vital things?

* * *

A flock of little birds came fluttering down about him
there,
Picking the seeds from last year's withered stalks
Their happy chirping roused Him from His somber
mood.

He rose and paced the path along the rocky ledge,
Worn by the tortured pacing of those forty days.
The rain had ceased at last, and, even now,¹
The dripping shrubs showed green
And all the desert plain was veiled in mist.

* * *

For many peaceful days that radiant spring,
He watched the birds find food and build their nests.
He saw the lilies push green shoots above the soil,
Stretch eager fingers upward to the April sky.
And when, at last, the hills and barren plain
Were all abloom, and nesting birds had found their homes
In flowering bush or crannied rock,
He rose and went down, comforted and reassured,
To where the waiting plain stretched out toward Galilee.
"His angels came and ministered to me!" he thought.
"If God doth so find food for little birds,
If He so clothes the lilies of the field,
How much more, then, will He provide for me!
Oh, Man of little faith!"

* * *

So, confident and unafraid, He took the road
That led at last to Calvary.

TWO CROSSES

The Easter cross upon the altar shelf
Was gleaming gold; the lilies hosts of angels
Bearing it aloft to God.
A hundred candles flamed and flared
Like celebrants in quivering ecstasy.
The thunder of the organ's diapasons
Re-echoed through the arches of the nave,
And from the shadowy choir glad halleluiahs rang.

* * *

On Calvary the cross was not of gold—
Only two rough-hewn oaken beams!
No lilies, in angelic white, no flame of candles.
On a bare, bleak, lonely hill,
Against a lurid dawn, a young man's broken body
Suffering the long, slow agony of lingering death—
His crime—his accusing message to a wicked world.

PATIENT LOVE

"Having loved His own He loved them to the end."
 How tender is this tribute to the Nazarene!
 Despite their human faults, He loved His friends
 And loved them to the end. Betrayed, denied,
 Abandoned to the mercies of the ravening mob,
 He still forgave, and loved them still to Calvary.
 And as He hung in agony upon His cross,
 Of all He loved, His mother only, and the Magdalene,
 And that young dreamer whom He loved the best,
 Were there to share His passion to the end.
 Oh, Love Divine that loved its own so patiently
 And having loved them, loved them to the end!

EASTER MORNING

Daybreak magic in a hillside garden in spring;
The mystic hour that just precedes the dawn;
The darkness sweet with jessamine and heliotrope,
The night-flowered cereus and the pungent yew.
How could the Master lie silent in His tomb—
Eyes closed, hands folded—when all about Him
Birds were singing matins to the sun,
And lilies, waking from their night of sleep
Were opening to the roseate light of dawn?
No miracle, that He who loved that hour
Should rise to greet it from the sleep of death.

HIS CHOSEN MESSENGER

Of all whom He had loved, the Master chose the
Magdalene,
Weeping alone outside His empty tomb,
To bear the message of that Easter morn.
She who most had sinned, who most had been forgiven,
Who most had loved her Lord, was sent,
On flying feet, to tell His friends—a messenger of hope,
“The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen! The Lord is risen,
indeed!”

AN EASTER THOUGHT

Death seems so casual to me—
The end of what—alas—has been,
High hope for what is yet to be—
An incident in life's brief scene.
Come childhood, youth, maturity, and age;
Then, to review life's pilgrimage,
We pause and through our blinding tears
Look back across the dimming years.
As in a vague nostalgic dream,
Birth, life, and death, to me, will always seem
Mere incidents, and death will mean to me
High hope for what is yet to be.

THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW

When Death comes suddenly—a blinding flash of pain,
That rends one's universe in twain, and then the dark,
There is no time for fear, no need for courage, then.
But when one treads the long and painful path
Down through some valley, rough and steep,
Where Death haunts every shadowy crevice of the rock,
One needs to know the Shepherd goes before,
To feel His presence there to guide and guard,
His staff to keep one's feet within the path,
His rod to succor one in hour of need.
One cannot go alone.

RESURRECTION

Wrapt snugly, fold on fold, for the cold of winter
And the heaving frosts of spring, I place this bulb
In the soft, brown soil—warm still from the autumn sun.
I press the earth about it gently—somerly,
For the November sky is gray; the wind is sharp.
“Little bulb,” I whisper, “If I be gone, when you shall
 come again”—
“When you shall come again”—Suddenly the garden in
 May
Is about me there where I kneel in the garden path—
Violets by the wall, scillas and hyacinths, a crocus or two,
And arabis, snowdrops, bloodroot, and hepatica bloom.
“If I be gone, when you shall come again,
Bid all my friends, the flowers, ‘Good day’ for me,
And bid them bloom for other hands
As they have bloomed for me.”

ETERNITY

I must go out alone, alone,
Into the void of the great unknown.
But whether I rise like a shaft of light
Up through the dark of the cosmic night,
Far and beyond the farthest star
To stand before God's judgment bar;
Or whether I merge, like a drop of dew,
In some restless ocean of limitless blue,
Or just drift off, in blest release,
Into sleep that brings me endless peace;
Wherever I am, whatever I be,
I know it still, as now, will be
A part of God's plan for eternity.

V

AN OLD MAN'S MUSINGS

A PRAYER FOR AGING YEARS

Dear Lord:

I brought forth fruit in every fruitful year.
Oh grant, that, as the browning autumn comes
My leaves shall neither wither nor grow sere,
And let the autumn fruits be rich with autumn sun.

AGING

When eyes and ears and muscles fail,
When steps grow slow and faltering,
When I can turn, no more, the soil
About my growing plants; no longer
Hear my thrushes when they sing at dawn,
Or frogs in chorus of a moist spring night;
No longer see horizons as sharp lines
Against the blue, but only as vague distances;
And when the scent of lilacs and of crab-tree bloom
Is like a faint, sweet memory of vanished days,
I shall not mourn my lessening powers,
For I shall know that, from within and from above,
Will flow sustaining courage, strength of soul
To compensate for what I lose,
For as my days my strength shall be.

TRANSFIGURATION

I feel the drag of earth in every step I take—
In every aching muscle, in every stiffened joint.
Earth calls to earth. That call must be obeyed,
The outworn vesture of the flesh be laid aside.
But spirit calls to spirit, too; deep unto deep.
Responsive to that call, my soul thrills forth—
A glad, free spirit to a glad free life.

REMEMBERING

I may not quite remember
If this be August or September.
(The present somehow seems to lack
The romance of things further back.)
But I recall one autumn day
When I was six.
I ran away!
I still can smell the burning leaves
And see the rows of golden sheaves,
And thrill again to think how free
And vast the world seemed then to me—
The dome of blue above my head,
The slumbrous haze around me spread
On distant wood and distant hill.
I feel the spell cast on me still.
'Tis three score years and ten ago!
And yet my heart is still aglow,
Remembering!

FORGETTING

An old man lives in the past, they say;
But I have found a better way.
I find it wiser to try to forget
The things that I know I should regret.
No time for penitential tears
In these last precious aging years;
No time to tear old wounds apart;
No time to break one's tired heart
With memories that sting and smart.
Forgetting should become an art.

HEART'S DESIRE

Not, surely, baubles of an hour's allure,
Nor iron, nor brass, nor gold—
Not these my heart's desire.
I need to know the way to take.
So many paths, so many guides!
For me there is no fiery pillar and no cloud,
No thunder from Mount Sinai.
But in my soul, there speaks a still, small voice.
If I but harken, I shall know.
My judgments will be guided from above
And from within. They will shine forth like light,
The rightness of my judgments like the noonday sun.

A QUEST

Can I, by searching find out God?
Oh yes! But such a quest can never end.

* * *

Whence come the dews that drench the thirsty fields?
Who guides the homing swans through pathless space?
What power directs the paths of Jupiter and Mars,
Calls up the sun at dawn and sends the moon to rest?
No corner of eternal space so far remote
That I shall fail to find Him there—
Not visible, but evidenced by order of His ways;
No atom unpatterned by His hand;
No microscopic cell without its fleck of life.

* * *

I must not boast nor vaunt myself,
If, by my craft and diligent research,
I find out laws that govern space,
The ways of stars, of meteors, of distant worlds.
It is not I who hath created these.
But if, with all my heart, in all humility,
I seek, I know that I shall surely find.

WINGS

There have been moments when my spirit mounted up on
wings,
Swept upward on the surging glory of some symphony,
Or freed from limits of the flesh, of time and space
By some breath-taking vision of infinity.
Earth-bound and conscious of my aging limbs,
How great a boon it is to me to live again
Those winged moments of the vanished years.

* * *

That night when as a boy I first beheld
The blazing constellations through a telescope,
And felt myself float out through interstellar space,
To glimpse the strange, contorted mountains of the
moon,
To wave my good-night greetings to the evening star,
To play upon the Pleiades as on a shining harp.

* * *

That bright June day, when, as a youth, I lay
Face-upward on the grass beneath an orchard tree,
And through the windows of its shimmering green
Watched white-winged galleons of summer cloud
Sail out across the blue. Ah, how on wings of fancy
Did I cruise with them that day
Through all the oceans of the sky!

* * *

A man, on serious mission bent, in mid-Atlantic,
On the liner's topmost deck, alone,
The enameled dome of blue above my head without a
cloud,

The sea stretched, infinite, to shores I could not see.
'Twixt sea and sky I seemed to float, a speck of dust
In God's great universe. It seems no sacrilege to say
I thought I knew how God must feel
Who sits upon the circle of the earth
And takes the islands up as very little things.

* * *

And as I dream my old-man dreams
How glad I am I had my visions as a youth!

THE PURE IN HEART

Only the pure in heart see God
In all the ways their feet have trod.
They see Him in the pillared nave,
In shining altar, arch, and architrave,
The fragile petals of an opening flower,
The relentless logic of atomic power.
The awesome grandeur of summer thunder,
The dawn, the sunset fill their souls with wonder.
To hearts unsullied by corrupt desires
Or vision blind with passion's fires,
These are no happenings of chance,
No mere concomitants of circumstance.
In all the marvels of God's universe
The pure in heart see miracles diverse.
They fall upon their knees, each day,
Before their visions of the Lord, and pray.

LIFE CYCLE

My life has been the circle of my friends.
That circle widened as the years progressed.
First, in my childhood's little world,
Were Mother, Auntie Atkins—my old nurse—
And "Tippy"—homely little black-and-tan.
In my romantic teens came Jim and Gene,
Who played young Damon to my Pythias.
The friendship of my later years encircled half the world,
Enriched my life and gave it zest and scope.
But now the shadows lengthen!
The circle of my friends contracts from month to month.
But as I sit here in my orchard, this autumn day,
I dream them back again. The apples, ripening on the
trees,
Fall gently, to lie about me in the long, ripe grass.
The haze of autumn blues the distant hills.
The dear familiar faces shine again;
They smile upon me as they used to smile—
Still mine to love! Still mine to treasure to the end.

DAMON TO PYTHIAS

(Years After)

Last night, I saw you, Damon, in my dreams
As once you were—tall, young, and beautiful.
Oh, if you still survive in some far place,
Send but some word of sweet remembrance,
Damon, to your Pythias.
Oh, let me feel the pressure of your hand
Across the years, the beating of your heart
Against my own! If our enfeebled bodies,
Faltering steps preclude our meeting in the flesh,
Send out, along the mystic currents of the air,
Some token word, some message of your constancy and
care,
And I will capture it and hold it to my breast,
And I shall know our friendship stood the test.

THE ANGELUS

The artists, in my youth, at least essayed
To make their paintings match the things they saw,
And what they saw was good and true and beautiful.
The artists, in our day, choose not to see the good.
At least they see it with an astigmatic eye;
Or, viciously, with firm intent, distort
Its features till their record is not true.
The humble peasants, as the Angelus
Proclaims the sunset hour, no longer bow
In reverence to pray, but, sodden in their toil,
Gaze, full of hate, across the acres of their day's employ.
The murk of war clouds threatens in the sky.
Such records of our troubled world today
Are neither true nor are they beautiful.
The glory of a sunset sky
Still sheds its benediction on our hearts today,
And, still, we sometimes need to pause to pray.

THE RAINBOW

No place is left for the wonder and amaze
We felt in childhood's simpler, happier days.
We see the rainbow shining through the rain
And try to summon up—but quite in vain—
The reverence with which we gazed and said:
"God's promise! Yonder brooding thunderhead
Holds nothing that we need to fear or dread."
No more, as once, we lift our hearts and pray.
"It is the spectrum," savants say.
The ancient promise is so soon forgot!
The scientists must all be right, I wot
But something tender, beautiful, and fine
Is lost forever, something—seems to me—divine.

THE MEEK

The earth, the earth is mine inheritance!
Because I harbored no undue desire.
No avid greed for riches, lust for power,
The earth, as God intended, is my boon—
Its waterways, its mountain barriers,
Its whispering forests and its running streams,
Its rocks, its dunes of shifting sand.
Because I love them as God's gifts to me,
They are my very own—my treasures and my heritage.

PRAYER

I do not always kneel to pray,
As, when I was a child, I did each day.
No need to fold my hands and shield my face
Since I see God in every place—
In cloud and sun, in earth and air.
His presence is about me everywhere.
The long companionship of years
Has rid me of my childish fears.
I do not beat my breast and plead.
He knows my every inmost need.

REVELATION

One day when I was seven,
My mother bade me take her reading glass
And look, with her, into a lily's golden throat.
I looked.
At what I saw my heart leaped up;
My eyes, I know, were dark with wonder and amaze.
"God made it, Son," my mother said.

* * *

When I was seventeen, the stars I loved—
Remote and unapproachable, they seemed—
Were, in one breathless moment, brought within my ken.
The telescope swept interstellar space,
And suddenly, I seemed to float
Among the shining hosts!
"Oh, God!" I whispered to myself,
"How infinite! How infinite!"

* * *

At twenty-seven—a day to be remembered ever,
I saw, in my beloved's eyes, a light
I knew would shine upon me to the end,
Lighting my pathway through the years.
And then I understood that God is love.

* * *

Now, at my three-score-years-and-ten,
I trace the pattern of the vanished years.

In this perspective viewed, life bears
A unity—a plan. Some guiding power
Has surely shaped my course and borne me on
Through all the blinding mists and darkness of the way.
In this, I cannot fail to see God's guiding hand.

HIS PEACE

Peace—His peace—

The peace of stars, of constellations, galaxies,
That sail serenely through eternal space,
Obeying the changeless patterns of their way,
Prescribed at their creation—

That peace He left us.

Let us pursue our ordered course,
Not dazzled by the glitter of the Milky Way,
Nor yet distraught by vagrant meteors
Or wandering stars.

MIRACLE

This little poppy seed evades my fingers
As it slips away to hide
In crevices of garden soil.
It seems inert as any grain of sand.
Yet, in its tiny shell it treasures latent forces
That I cannot see, and only vaguely comprehend.
Come rain, come sun, when winter wanes,
And its small germ, as potent as an atom bomb,
Will burst its casement, and, through clay and loam,
Will push its way toward Heaven and God.

THE INNER LIGHT

What is the human soul but this—
One's full capacity for perfect, utter bliss,
Transcending transient pleasures of the mind,
Enslavement to the senses, to the spirit blind?
It is the radiance of inner light
That shines beyond the range of human sight,
Revealing things the eye could never see,
Nor mind alone, by logic, ever prove to be.

HILLS AND STARS

My path has sometimes been so steep, so rough,
That I must needs watch every step,
Mine eyes intent on all the hazards of the way.
The stars, at night, forgot; the hills by day,
I stumbled blindly on with bleeding feet.
I only felt the thorns, the stones, the gullied path.
But Oh, the stars were there, and the eternal hills!
I only needed to look up, to feel
Fresh strength, fresh courage, the shelter of "the ever-
lasting arms."

SOMBER AUTUMNAL BEAUTY

He little merits who sees beauty
In the sun-lit scene alone—sunrise, sunset,
The glittering crystal of a winter's day.
The soul is stirred, as well, in strange mysterious ways—
The somber beauty of a misty autumn day,
Hills blue as blue on ripened grapes,
A day of slanting rain on thirsty trees.
Beauty, to be beauty, need not be forever gay.
A summer storm may move the spirit
To its deepest depths more surely than an April sun.
The spirit needs to feel the sadness of the world;
Else would it have but surface gladness
When the sun lights up the morning hills.

TREASURE IN HEAVEN

Mine to suffer and to bear,
Mine to succor and to share.
This shall be the final measure
Of my well accumulated treasure.
Did I bear and never faint?
Did I lend a helping hand?
Did I give without demand,
Freely, gladly, while on earth?
Then there will not be a dearth
Of credit in God's judgment book.

TO A FRIEND IN SORROW

Oh do not so suppress thy grief!
There is no virtue in such self-control.
Tears are the catharsis of the soul;
Tears wash away from hearts that grieve
All bitterness, and only leave
The rainbow shining through the rain.
Your sun will someday shine again.
Go, sit alone, and let them flow.
This one sure comfort, for the moment, you may know.

AS SEEING THE INVISIBLE

I bear this weight of bitter grief,
For which there seems no sure relief,
Because I see His radiant face
In earth and air—in every place
Where flowers bloom and waters flow,
Where mountains tower and sunsets glow.
I stand the smart, the bitter sting
Of human perfidy and everything
That tears my tortured heart apart;
I can endure the nights and days,
When I despair of human ways,
Because, above the noise and strife,
The human bickerings, the storms of life,
I seem to feel His Presence pass
In whispering airs through summer grass,
In distant thunder on summer hills,
And bow in thanks that human ills
Seem petty when I think of God,
And worship, where His feet have trod.

STARS AND TEARS

I never saw the stars so beautiful
As when I saw them through my tears.
Their scintillating rays of light,
Sped to me from the spaces of infinity,
Became bright messengers of hope.
The light of God shone in upon my soul
And I no longer groped in hopeless gloom.

SHOES OF IRON AND BRASS

My lyre is silent and its strings unstrung!
My heart is broken and my songs unsung!
The little boys I used to know are gone to war.
I used to watch them—seems but yesterday—
As they went by along the country road to school.
And now they're grown and gone away to war!
Dear God and Father of us all—dear God—
Give them the promised shoes of iron and brass
To tread the harsh and cruel paths of war.
Dear God, give us, in lonely farmhouse homes,
The hearts of steel to bear our loneliness and grief.

STORM CLOUDS

No more, no more the soft white summer clouds
Cruising serenely across the summer blue!
No more those argosies of peace!
The thunder mutters in the Eastern hills;
Clouds, turgid with the winds of war
And riv'n by bolts of fire,
Roll up across the sun.
The air is heavy with the threat of storm.
No more, no more the skies of peace!

OUR WORLD

Our world has been
Just you and I.
The scene is changing
As the years slip by.
I wonder often what 'twill be
When fortune leaves
Just you or me.

GOLDEN WEDDING DAY

My Dear:

The light that shed its glory on that day
When first I saw you and my young heart knew
That here, indeed for both of us, was destiny supreme,
Still shines on this our Golden Wedding Day.
That face, the loveliest I had ever seen,
In all its sweet young beauty,
Still seems indeed Heaven's special gift to me.
Years have not dimmed the beauty of your smile,
Nor life the light of love within your eyes.
Oh dearest! if I could but somehow half repay
All that you have meant to me since that far day.

